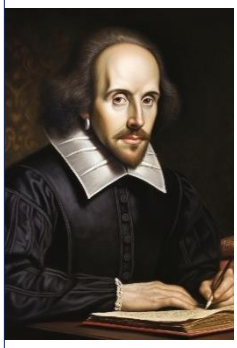


Research Institute Andishe Online Germany AOG

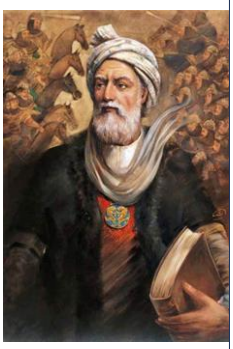
From Tus to London

A Comparative Study of the Lives and Legacies of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare

Part I

A Paper by Faramarz Tabesh

Section: Excerpt from the "Topics from the University"



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From Tus to London
A Comparative Study of the Lives and Legacies of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare
Part I

Introduction

Literature serves as a comprehensive mirror reflecting the spirit of civilizations. Within this mirror—across various fields, and notably in literature and culture—there occasionally emerge figures who are not merely creators of words but architects of their nations' cultural identities. Hakim Abu'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi[1], the preeminent epic poet of Iran, and William Shakespeare, England's renowned playwright, stand as two unparalleled summits in world literature. Their works continue to be read, analyzed, and inspire audiences beyond the bounds of time and place.

This article adopts a comparative perspective to examine the biographies, achievements, historical ambiguities, and enduring legacies of these two great literary figures. We begin with a concise overview of their lives, then analyze the significance and impact of their works on their respective literary and cultural landscapes. Next, we explore certain lesser-known anecdotes and controversies surrounding their lives. Finally, in a dedicated comparative section, we will scrutinize the similarities and differences between Ferdowsi and Shakespeare in terms of style, themes, and influence. The aim here is not to elevate one above the other, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of the roles they played in shaping the cultural identities of their peoples.

In this study, the chronology of events related to Ferdowsi is documented not only according to the Solar Hijri[2] and Gregorian calendars but also using the Ancient Persian calendar[3] (**APC**), a modern chronological system grounded in the reign of Cyrus the Great[4]. By adding 558 years to the Gregorian date, one obtains the corresponding Ancient Persian year.

A key point about this paper:

Since this research will be translated into multiple languages and published on the website of Andishe Online Germany (AOG)[5] as well as other academic platforms, it is important to clarify that the concept of "balanced Iranian nationalism,"[6] as introduced in my previous work, is entirely distinct from — and not affiliated with — any far-right ideology. I believe that, over time, this form of nationalism, envisioned as a "third way" between the extremes of the right and the left, will gain broader acceptance within the global academic and political discourse.

APC=Ancient Persian calendar

1-Ferdowsi and the Shahnameh: A Pillar of Persian Identity

Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi Tousi was born around 1499 APC (approximately 940 CE) in the village of Paj (also spelled Pazh)[7], near the city of **Tus**[8] in what is now Razavi Khorasan Province in northeastern Iran. He lived during the era of the Samanid dynasty[9] and passed away in 1579 APC (1020 CE) in Tus, where he was also laid to rest.

"I shall not die, for I am alive
I've sown the seeds of verse far and wide
All those with wisdom, faith, and grace
Will honor me after I've left this place"

Ferdowsi is widely regarded as one of the greatest epic poets in the history of Iran. His lifetime coincided with what can be described as a cultural renaissance in Iran, following centuries of Arab dominance. His magnum opus, the *Shahnameh* (*The Book of Kings*)[10], is not only a literary masterpiece but also fundamentally serves as the backbone of Iranian national identity.

Ferdowsi was born into a *dehqan* family[11]—a social class deeply connected with pre-Islamic Iranian traditions. It is crucial to note that in ancient Iranian society, especially during the Sasanian era[12] and continuing into the early centuries following the Arab conquest, the term *dehqan* referred to members of the landowning aristocracy—custodians of Iranian culture and heritage. This should not be confused with the modern use of the word, which typically denotes a simple farmer.

Furthermore, I hold the belief that the term *dehqan* originally existed as *dehgan*[13]—bearing the same cultural and aristocratic significance—before the Arab invasion of Iran. After much research, I was fortunate to find scholarly sources that align with this interpretation, lending credibility to this view.

Details about Ferdowsi's early life remain scarce. However, it is generally believed that he was educated in literature, history, and the Arabic language. Both my own view and that of many scholars is that Ferdowsi's decision to compose the *Shahnameh* in Persian rather than Arabic was a deliberate and conscious cultural act. It was meant to preserve the Persian language and identity against the expanding influence of Arab culture and language.

A particularly astonishing issue surrounding Ferdowsi's legacy is his omission from *The History of Bayhaqi*[14], authored by Abu'l-Fazl Mohammad ibn Hossein **Bayhaqi** of Nishapur. Bayhaqi served in the royal courts of Sultan Mahmud and Sultan Masud[15] and was among the elite secretaries of the court. Despite the comprehensive and meticulous nature of his historical chronicle, Bayhaqi does not mention Ferdowsi, though he does cite other poets such as Farrukhi, Asjadi, and Unsuri.

Although I have not personally examined *The History of Bayhaqi* in depth, numerous respected scholars and experts on Ferdowsi have highlighted this absence. One possible explanation is that references to Ferdowsi were deliberately removed, either during Bayhaqi's lifetime or afterward, due to Arab hostility toward Persian identity. This idea, while speculative, is not implausible. Some mystics have even suggested that early versions of the Quran may have included references to Zoroaster[16] and to the Iranian people, which were subsequently removed within the first few decades after the emergence of Islam. However, verifying such claims is extremely difficult and remains beyond the reach of most historical analysis.

Historical research indicates that the earliest credible source to document Ferdowsi may have been *Chahar Maqaleh* (*The Four Discourses*) by *Nizami Aruzi*[17].

Ferdowsi died in 1579 APC (1020 CE) in Tus, and his tomb remains there to this day. His mausoleum is now a prominent site of pilgrimage and a cultural gathering point for Iranian nationalists[18]. It stands as a powerful symbol of the revival and preservation of the Persian language and heritage.

National and Cultural Legacy

The *Shahnameh*, authored by Ferdowsi, stands as the narrative of Iran's national epic and remains one of the foundational pillars of the country's ancient identity. Iranians, recognizing the magnitude of this cultural treasure, continue to honor Ferdowsi and his unparalleled work. Each year, they gather at his mausoleum in a solemn national tribute, offering their gratitude to his memory and spirit.

The construction of Ferdowsi's mausoleum began in 2492[19] APC (1313 in the Iranian solar calendar, equivalent to 1934 CE) under the order of Reza Shah Pahlavi[20]. This initiative was part of the Ferdowsi Millennium Celebrations, which invited international scholars to participate. The distinguished French architect and archaeologist **André Godard**[21] was commissioned with the honor of designing and building a monument worthy of Ferdowsi in Tus—a historic region approximately 25 kilometers northwest of Mashhad, in the province of Razavi Khorasan.

The structure was later restored in 2526–2527 APC (1347 SH / 1968–69 CE) by the order of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, with the artistic direction of Hooshang Seyhoun[22], one of Iran's most prominent architects. Seyhoun's design drew inspiration from Achaemenid architecture, specifically from the tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae[23], fusing historical grandeur with national reverence.

According to official information from UNESCO's website, the mausoleum was added to the organization's Tentative List[24] in 2565 APC (2007 CE) under the name *The Tus Complex*. However, as of yet, it has not received final World Heritage designation.

Ferdowsi's unmatched efforts in reviving the Persian language and the ancient history of Iran led to the spread of Persian arts and literature beyond the country's borders. This enduring influence will be explored further in the following sections.

To conclude this part, we reflect on the words of one of the most respected British Iranologists and Orientalists, **Edward Granville Browne**[25] (1862–1926), who stated:

"Ferdowsi rescued the Persian language from the dominance of Arabic vocabulary and style, and with the Shahnameh, he revived the cultural identity of Iran."

The Shahnameh – The Book of Kings

A Literary Epic and the Eternal Voice of Persian

Ferdowsi began composing the *Shahnameh* around the year 1536 APC[26] (corresponding to 977 CE) and devoted more than thirty years of his life to this monumental task. His primary sources included the *Khwaday-Namag*[27] (a Pahlavi-language chronicle of Iranian kings), oral traditions, Zoroastrian written texts, and, importantly, his own intellectual insight and poetic vision.

An Important Note on the Language of the Shahnameh

It is essential to address a common misconception—particularly propagated by sources influenced by Russian scholarship—that the language of the *Shahnameh* is *"Dari Persian."* In reality, Dari, as spoken in parts of historical Khorasan during ancient Iran, underwent significant transformations, especially after the disintegration of Greater Khorasan[28] under Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet Union and British colonial influence.

The regions that were separated—such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and others—now speak a modified form of Persian known as Dari. However, this *"modified Dari"* has absorbed a considerable number of foreign words[29]. For instance, Tajik Dari includes numerous Russian loanwords, while Afghan Dari has absorbed terms from Hindi and English. A relevant example is the use of the word *chutney* (from Hindi) for sour condiments, although it differs slightly from the traditional Indian *āchār*.

In my view, the true Dari dialect survives primarily in the three provinces of Iranian Khorasan and, to a lesser extent, in Herat, Afghanistan. Remarkably, one of Ferdowsi's great achievements was that,

despite being from Khorasan himself, he avoided allowing his epic to be influenced either by Arabic or by Dari. Instead, he succeeded in crafting a uniquely Persian linguistic register—one that is still used predominantly by Iranians today.

This linguistic precision can also be seen in the works of **Nezami Ganjavi**[30], the celebrated Iranian mystical poet. From what I recall of Nezami's collected works (*Kulliyat*), his poetry exhibits the same elegant and classical Persian tone as Ferdowsi's, without containing a single verse in Azeri Turkish—even though Nezami lived about two centuries after Ferdowsi (Ferdowsi: c. 940 CE / Nezami: c. 1136 CE). This consistency reflects the deep love that Iran's great mystic poets held for their homeland and its rich cultural identity.

The **Samanid dynasty**[31]—an Iranian ruling family that strongly valued Iran's heritage and language—supported Ferdowsi's efforts from the beginning. However, by the time the *Shahnameh* was nearing completion, political power had shifted to the Ghaznavids[32] under **Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni**, who came to rule Iran around 1556 APC (approximately 998 CE). This political change introduced a degree of historical ambiguity, which will be addressed in the following section.

The *Shahnameh* is an epic composed of roughly 50,000 couplets[33], making it one of the longest epic poems in world literature authored by a single poet. Written in modern Persian (*New Persian*), the *Shahnameh* chronicles the history of Iran from the era of historically unrecorded Kings and legends to the fall of the **Sasanian Empire** in the 7th century CE. The work is traditionally divided into three main sections[34]:

Mythological Vision: The Eternal Struggle of Light and Darkness

The *Shahnameh* begins with a mythological worldview, presenting a cosmology and moral philosophy deeply rooted in ancient Iranian beliefs[35]. It opens with the creation of the world and the reign of the first human king, **Keyumars**[36], a figure akin to a primordial monarch and civilizer. Through a symbolic lens, the early kings represent stages in the development of human civilization and the unfolding of divine order in the world.

Among the early tales is the story of **Hushang**[37], who, in a moment of triumph, discovers fire—bringing light and knowledge to humanity. He is followed by Jamshid, who establishes Nowruz[38], the Persian New Year, and ushers in a golden, divine era—an Ahuric age[39]. However, Jamshid eventually falls into arrogance and self-glorification, and as a result, he loses his farr-e izadi (divine glory or divine sanction)[40], symbolizing the withdrawal of cosmic favor due to hubris.

In contrast to these bearers of light and order stands Zahhak, a tyrannical ruler whose shoulders sprout serpents that must be fed with human brains—a clear allegory of demonic corruption and the devouring of innocence. These narratives are not mere stories; they form a metaphysical structure depicting the eternal conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, order and chaos[41].

Fereydun, the hero who defeats Zahhak, symbolizes the restoration of divine justice and the renewal of an Ahuric golden age for Iran and, symbolically, for the world at large. His victory is not just a political triumph—it is a spiritual cleansing that restores cosmic balance.

Historical Context and Scholarly Interpretations

In my view, this mythological era reflects a time prior to the rise of the **Achaemenid Empire**[42]. Although some scholars of the *Shahnameh* identify certain characters as mythologized versions of historical figures from early imperial Iran, the epic's intention is clearly to frame these events in the timeless language of mythology and moral philosophy.

For instance, based on Ferdowsi's detailed descriptions of **Fereydun** and **Kay Khosrow**, some researchers have proposed that one of these figures could be a mythologized version of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty. This interpretation suggests that Ferdowsi, through poetic allegory, may have sought to embed the ideals of kingship and justice into the legendary prototypes of later historical rulers.

Regardless of the precise historical mappings, what remains central is that this portion of the *Shahnameh* conveys the Zoroastrian ethical paradigm[43]: the world is a battleground between forces of light (*asha*) and darkness (*druj*), and human destiny hinges on moral courage, wisdom, and divine guidance.

The Heroic Vision: Light Wielded by Mortal Hands

The most celebrated and expansive portion of the *Shahnameh* is devoted to what scholars call the heroic cycle[44]. In these epic narratives, Ferdowsi recounts the lives, valor, and moral struggles of men and women of integrity—brave, loyal, and noble warriors—who stand in eternal defiance against monstrous and demonic forces of darkness and destruction.

At the heart of this cycle stands **Rostam**[45], the greatest of all Iranian champions. Rostam is a larger-than-life hero who battles demons (*divs*), slays dragons, and aids kings in restoring justice and order. One of the most tragic tales in this section is the story of **Rostam and Sohrab**[46], where Rostam,

unaware of Sohrab's identity, unknowingly kills his own son in battle. The depth of grief, irony, and poetic tragedy in this episode remains one of the most powerful moments in world literature.

Other notable figures in the heroic cycle include **Esfandiyar**, son of King Goshtasp, a prince bound by duty and a symbol of courage, faith, and devotion. His story is particularly significant for its tragic tone and moral complexity. Esfandiyar, out of obedience to his father, is compelled to confront Rostam, the nation's greatest hero. In a climactic battle, Rostam—guided by the mythical bird **Simurgh**[47]—strikes Esfandiyar in the eyes, the only vulnerable part of his otherwise invincible body. This leads to his death, and ever since, the phrase **"the eyes of Esfandiyar"**[48] has become a Persian idiom symbolizing a person or state's Achilles' heel—a fatal weakness.

Over time, the stories of the *Shahnameh* have infused Persian discourse with vivid metaphors. Expressions like **"Rostam of the times," "fatal poison," "like Tahmineh," "Zāl-like," "Fereydun-like,"** and **"in the manner of the Simurgh"** have entered the cultural lexicon, reflecting the deep moral and symbolic resonance of Ferdowsi's characters[49].

Another luminous figure in the epic is **Siyavash**[50], who embodies purity, virtue, self-sacrifice, and restraint. He plays a pivotal role in the narrative and stands as a model of incorruptible morality. In a creative extension of this legend, I have personally composed a short story inspired by Siyavash's tale, translated into Persian, English, and German, and published it alongside video clips via AOG's platforms[51]. This project may be of interest to lovers of Persian literature and comparative mythology.

Importantly, Ferdowsi also gave voice to many powerful female characters. Notable among them is **Rudabeh**, mother of Rostam, whose love for **Zāl** (Rostam's father) is a tale of romantic nobility. Another is **Tahmineh**, Rostam's wife and the mother of **Sohrab**, who plays a pivotal role in the story of their tragic son. **Gordafarid**, a courageous female warrior, disguises herself as a man and fights valiantly to defend the White Fortress against Sohrab[52]. Her bravery earns Sohrab's admiration and highlights Ferdowsi's recognition of women as agents of power, valor, and virtue in the epic landscape[53].

The Historical Vision: The Fall of an Empire, the Lament of a Nation

In the final section of the *Shahnameh*[54], Ferdowsi[55] shifts into a more historical register, recounting the realms of the Parthian (Ashkanian) and Sasanian dynasties[56]. These chapters trace the lineage of kings, political events, and cultural shifts that led up to the Arab conquest of Persia and the fall of **Yazdegerd III**, the last Sasanian monarch[57].

Ferdowsi's tone here becomes elegiac and mournful, reflecting a deep lament for the collapse of Iran's imperial glory and cultural sovereignty. The narrative sorrowfully observes the loss of a world that once stood tall with wisdom, justice, and grandeur.

From a historical standpoint, one must acknowledge that Ferdowsi's inclusion of semi-legendary or undocumented figures is not a flaw, but rather a unique strength of the *Shahnameh*[58]. For much of Iranian history has been distorted, erased, or silenced—whether through conquest, ideological rewriting, or the passage of time. Ferdowsi's epic thus serves not merely as a literary treasure, but as a historical corrective, a repository of cultural memory that resists erasure[59].

This subject—the buried achievements of ancient Iran and the deliberate obscuring of its past—will be examined in the final section of this essay titled *"The Achievements of the Iranians, Lost in the Dust of Darkened History."*

The Rhythm of the Shahnameh: Form, Function, and the Pulse of Heroism

The *Shahnameh* is composed in the poetic form of masnavi and in the **motaqāreb meter**[60]—a meter especially well-suited to long-form epic narratives. In the masnavi structure, each couplet possesses its own independent rhyme; that is, the two hemistichs (lines) of each verse rhyme only with each other, not with surrounding verses. This structure offers Ferdowsi significant stylistic flexibility, particularly valuable when composing a work of over 50,000 lines.

The motaqāreb meter—a powerful, rhythmic, and consistent beat—amplifies the heroic and grandiose tone of the epic. When this meter is combined with lofty and martial vocabulary, it evokes a profound sense of majesty, struggle, and triumph[61].

(Cho Irān nabāshad, tan-e man mabād Bar in būm o bar zendeh yektan mabād)
"If there is no Iran, may my body not live
May not one soul remain on this soil."[62]

This meter mimics the cadence of war drums and thus stirs the soul as if preparing it for an epic confrontation. It is not only resonant and commanding but also fluid and memorable, which made it ideal for oral performance and memorization—especially by the naqqāls (traditional storytellers) in Persian teahouses[63].

Another benefit of the masnavi form in combination with the motaqāreb meter is its linguistic flexibility. Since rhymes do not extend across multiple couplets, the poet is not constrained by repetitive rhyme patterns, allowing Ferdowsi a greater range in word choice and narrative flow.

" These verses from the Shahnameh have been approximately translated into English"

(Kherad chashm-e jān ast chon bengari To bī chashm-e shādān jahān naspari)

"Look deeply, and you'll see, wisdom is the mind's true eye

Without it, a joyful life is out of reach."

(Nakhost āfarinesh kherad rā shenās Negahbān-e jān ast o ān-e seh pās)

Among all creations, first recognize wisdom

which is the guardian of your soul, eyes, ears, and tongue.

The meter's rhythmic potency is especially apparent during intense narrative arcs—such as the battle between Rostam and Sohrab—when the tempo becomes fast-paced and pounding[64]:

(Ze jāy andar āmad cho ātash Qobād Bejonbīd lashkar cho daryā ze bād)

Qaboos rose with fiery zeal,

and his army moved like the sea stirred by the wind.

(Barāmad khoroshidan-e dār o kūb Derakhshidan-e khanjar o zakhm-e chub)

The sound of the woodpecker's roar arose

(and) the gleam of daggers and the movement of clubs appeared

Most *Shahnameh* scholars agree that Ferdowsi deliberately used a highly purified form of Persian, with minimal inclusion of Arabic vocabulary[65]. This linguistic choice is often seen as a conscious effort to revive and preserve the Persian language—what we now refer to as Modern Persian (Parsi-ye nowīn). In doing so, Ferdowsi not only composed an epic, but forged a linguistic-cultural foundation that would influence Persianate societies for generations.

Modern linguists and historians often connect the *Shahnameh*'s language to the cultural sphere of Greater Khorasan, where Ferdowsi was born, and which remained a stronghold of Persian identity despite centuries of foreign domination[66]. Importantly, Ferdowsi maintained this linguistic heritage without allowing the tone of the Shahnameh to be influenced by *"Dari Persian"*.

Two years before composing this article, I published a two-part study entitled "The Historical Influence of Iranians on the Indian Subcontinent" in the Persian-language section of the Research Institute Andishe Online Germany (AOG) website. In that study, I examined in depth the cultural and linguistic impact of Persian in South Asia, providing a comprehensive analysis of the region's long-standing historical connections with Iran.

Historical and Cultural Significance of the Shahnameh

The *Shahnameh* holds a pivotal place in the preservation of Persian language and culture, particularly during a historical period when Arabic had become the dominant linguistic and cultural force in much of the Iranian plateau. By composing his epic entirely in Persian, Ferdowsi revived the literary prestige of the ancient Iranian tongue, paving the way for a renewed sense of national and cultural identity rooted in a pre-Islamic past.

Through its poetic elegance and epic narratives, the *Shahnameh* rekindled a cultural memory that extended far beyond mere storytelling. It restored a sense of continuity with Iran's Zoroastrian, mythic, and royal heritage, reinvigorating a language that had been marginalized under centuries of Arab influence. The *Shahnameh* gave voice to a distinctly Iranian worldview, one rich in moral philosophy, heroic ideals, and historical consciousness.

The epic has served as an enduring source of inspiration for poets, painters, and writers throughout the Persian-speaking world and beyond. Its stories have been adapted into miniatures, oral performances, theatrical renditions, and even modern cinema, attesting to its lasting popularity and cultural resonance. For instance, scholars believe that works like *Garshasp-nama* by Asadi Tusi were directly influenced by Ferdowsi's masterpiece[67].

The influence of the *Shahnameh* was not limited to Iran. It reached deep into Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and even the Ottoman Empire, leaving a lasting mark on artistic and literary traditions in those regions. Notable examples include:

- **The Shahnameh of Akbar**: Commissioned in the 21st–22nd century APC. (corresponding to the 16th century C.E.), this magnificent illustrated manuscript was created in the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great. Among the most exquisitely illustrated Persian manuscripts ever produced, it brought together Persian and Indian artists, merging Persian miniature aesthetics with indigenous Mughal styles. Akbar reportedly commissioned several versions of the *Shahnameh*, but the most celebrated among them came to be known as the Akbari Shahnameh[68].

- **Court painters such as Bishan Das and Sanwalah**: These master artists flourished in the Mughal court of Emperor Jahangir (22nd–23rd century APC, i.e., 17th century C.E.). Their paintings—featuring iconic scenes such as Rostam and Sohrab or Siavash and Sudabeh—demonstrate a profound fusion of Persian epic themes with Indian visual storytelling[69].

- **The Ottoman Shahnameh**: A significant translation and adaptation of Ferdowsi's work into Ottoman Turkish, this version featured Ottoman-style illustrations and was circulated in the royal courts. Scholars argue that Iranian mythological figures deeply influenced Turkish

literature and identity, often blending with local legends and heroes. This version is now housed in the **Topkapi** Palace Library in Istanbul[70].

In all these instances, the *Shahnameh* transcended linguistic and geographic boundaries, establishing itself not just as a literary monument, but as a transcultural epic whose echoes can be found across a broad swath of the Eastern Islamic world.

Linguistic and Cultural Impact of the Shahnameh

There is a widely accepted belief among scholars that Ferdowsi's deliberate use of New Persian in the *Shahnameh* was a conscious act aimed at reviving and standardizing the Persian language in the aftermath of the Arab conquest of Iran. As reflected in the text, Ferdowsi took great care to avoid incorporating Arabic vocabulary, aiming to preserve the linguistic purity of Persian. He also deliberately refrained from mixing it with the regional Persian spoken in Greater Khorasan, commonly referred to as *"Dari Persian[71]"*.

This deliberate linguistic strategy contributed significantly to the *Shahnameh*'s endurance as a literary and cultural pillar of Iranian identity. It established a pure linguistic model that became a symbol of national authenticity, influencing later dynasties such as the **Safavids** and **Qajars**[72]. However, the *Shahnameh*'s linguistic and cultural influence reached its zenith during the era of Pahlavi nationalism under Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah, who launched extensive cultural campaigns to revive and institutionalize Iran's pre-Islamic heritage. These included the Millennial Celebrations of Ferdowsi, restoration of his mausoleum, and widespread cultural promotion of his legacy[73].

Repeatedly referred to as the cornerstone of Iranian identity, the *Shahnameh* was not merely a literary achievement but an act of cultural resistance. Composed in New Persian, it counteracted the Arabization of the region that had followed the 7th-century Islamic conquest. This conscious effort to preserve cultural and linguistic integrity helped ensure the survival of Iran's national identity, setting it apart from other regions subjected to similar pressures[74].

Unlike Iran, many nations faced with Arab expansion—such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, and various other African and Asian territories—underwent significant linguistic and cultural erosion, often abandoning their native tongues in favor of Arabic. While remnants of Aramaic or its offshoot, Syriac, are still spoken in limited religious or ethnic communities in parts of modern Iraq and Syria, their presence is marginal and symbolic at best[75].

Thanks to Ferdowsi's monumental effort, Persians retained not only their language but also their cultural memory and collective identity. This preservation has allowed Iran to maintain a continuity of historical consciousness and literary tradition unmatched by many other regions similarly conquered.

Global Influences of the Shahnameh

A particularly fascinating aspect of the *Shahnameh*'s legacy is its role as a source of inspiration for numerous illustrated manuscripts. One of the most notable among these is the Florence Manuscript, considered the oldest known illustrated version of the *Shahnameh*[76]. Such manuscripts are now housed in prestigious institutions such as the British Library, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where they are celebrated as cultural treasures combining Persian literature and visual artistry[77].

These illustrated versions are not only valuable to *Shahnameh* enthusiasts but also serve as essential resources for scholars studying art history, manuscript production, calligraphy, and Persian miniature painting. The illustrations reflect stylistic influences from various Persian artistic schools—including those of Herat, Tabriz, Shiraz, and Isfahan—and showcase the aesthetic evolution of Iranian art across centuries[78].

Some of the most prominent illustrated manuscripts of the Shahnameh include:

• **The Florence Shahnameh (Ms. Pers. 1):** Estimated to have been completed between 1873 and 1885 APC (*717–725 AH / 1317–1325 CE*), this manuscript is the oldest known illustrated copy of the *Shahnameh*. Preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, it represents both a **literary and visual triumph**. Its finely detailed illustrations highlight the importance of Ferdowsi's epic even centuries after its composition, suggesting that both the poet and his work were already known and esteemed in parts of Europe by that time[79].

• **The Baysonghor Shahnameh (1988 APC / 833 AH / 1430 CE):** Commissioned by Baysonghor Mirza, son of Shahrukh of the Timurid dynasty, this manuscript was produced in Herat, a major cultural hub of Iran. While the main portion is housed at the British Library (*MS. Or. 757*), fragments exist in other collections. In 2569 APC (2011 CE / 1390 SH), UNESCO added this version to the Memory of the World Register, recognizing its cultural and historical significance[80].

• **The Demotte Shahnameh (Great Ilkhanid Shahnameh):** Created around 1888 APC (ca. 1330 CE), this manuscript is attributed to the Tabriz school and is a masterpiece of Ilkhanid-era Persian illustration. Acquired by French art dealer Georges Joseph Demotte in the early 20th century (ca. 1910–1912 CE), it

was unfortunately disassembled and sold in individual pages, many of which are now scattered across museums worldwide[81].

• **The Tahmasp Shahnameh:** This opulent manuscript was commissioned by Shah Tahmasp of the Safavid dynasty between 2082 and 2093 APC (1524–1535 CE). It represents a peak of the Tabriz school of miniature painting and remains one of the most celebrated examples of Persian illustrated literature[82].

• **Later Manuscripts:** Other notable versions include the **Qavam al-Dowleh** Shahnameh from the Qajar era, and the Abu Taher Hossein Shahnameh, one of the earliest known copies. Additionally, *Shahnameh* manuscripts were produced in the courts of Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, demonstrating the extensive influence of Ferdowsi's work across cultures and regions[83].

As previously mentioned, many of these exquisite illustrations are now preserved in world-renowned museums, including the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.[84]

Since the overarching purpose of this article is to draw a literary comparison between Ferdowsi and Shakespeare, this overview of Ferdowsi's legacy will suffice. A thorough investigation of the poet's life and the many dimensions of his *magnum opus* would undoubtedly require a comprehensive monograph rather than a single article[85].

A Controversial Point

"It is important to note that this section may appear somewhat complex to English readers, as it deals with a verse from the epic poem Shahnameh. Translating and interpreting such poetry into non-Persian languages is inherently limited and can never fully capture its original depth and nuance."

At the end of this section, I feel it is important to point out a very tangible example of misinterpretation in the *Shahnameh*[86]. Consider the following line:

"Art is solely among Iranians."

This verse, often attributed to Ferdowsi[87], is commonly understood by the public in the following manner: **"Art is found only among Iranians, and not others."** This misinterpretation has unfortunately spread widely among us Iranians. However, the original line, as it appears in the *Shahnameh* and as published on the **Ganjoor website**[88], reads as follows:

"Art flows deeply from the Iranians They fear no beast, no matter how fierce.

"If this verse has indeed appeared in this form from the beginning in the *Shahnameh*, there is only one possibility: we must align ourselves with credible Iranian *Shahnameh* scholars and accept that this line

is a quote attributed to **Bahram Gur**[89], the Sassanian king, and not a personal opinion of Ferdowsi. Yet, this theory does not sit well with me, as the word **"too"**[90] in the line **"Art too is from Iranians"** can cause some confusion for the following reasons:

1. **Contradiction with the conjunction "and":** The word **"too"** carries the meaning of **"and likewise"**, implying emphasis on the fact that the action has occurred elsewhere too. In this case, the sentence would not make sense unless we overlook the conjunction **"and"** and interpret **"too"** not as **"and likewise"** but as **"very much"**, meaning: **"Art is also abundant among Iranians."**
2. **Alternative Interpretation:** If we do not wish to alter the structure of this verse, we might accept that the use of **"too"** emphasizes the presence of other virtues. For example, **"Keyumars has a shield, a spear, and also many arrows for his bow"**[91] (arrows are also present among Keyumars, and in abundance). In this case, the translation of the verse would be: **"Art, like other virtues, such as craftsmanship**[92]**, bravery**[93]**, and statecraft**[94]**, is abundant among Iranians."** This interpretation resolves the issue.

However, the popularized later versions, **"Art is solely among Iranians,"** which have become widespread in public discourse[95], are inaccurate and misleading, as their meaning suggests that no other group, nation, or people possesses art. This incorrect and offensive idea could never have originated from a great mind like Ferdowsi's. To provide readers of this study a better understanding of the narrative context of this controversial verse, I will offer a brief summary of it:

Literary and Historical Context:

This verse is discussed in the context of the reign of Bahram V (Bahram Gur)[96], the fifteenth monarch of the Sassanian dynasty and the fifth ruler bearing the name Bahram, as recounted in the Shahnameh. The story is summarized as follows:
Bahram Gur, the son of **Yazdegerd** I[97], ruled in the eleventh century APC (5th century CE)[98]. During a trip to India, he married the daughter of **Shangal**[99], the king of India. In part of the narrative, Bahram encounters the **Khagan of China**[100], where he emphasizes the superiority of Iranian art, bravery, and combat skills. The line

"Art, too, belongs much to the Iranian kind
They count the raging enemy as nothing in their mind."

reflects this sentiment. The first part of the verse refers to the distinctiveness of Iranian art, while the second part, with the reference to the rhinoceros, metaphorically alludes to the unmatched bravery of the Iranians, who disregard even the fiercest enemies, symbolized by the enraged rhinoceros[101].

Considering the original narrative and the analysis presented, I interpret the meaning of this controversial verse as follows:

"Along with other virtues (such as bravery and courage, as suggested by the second line), art is found in abundance among Iranians. And Iranians are so valiant that they fear not even the wildest beasts, like the enraged rhinoceros, whom they dismiss as nothing."

We will conclude this section with a statement from the distinguished American scholar and translator, Wheeler M. Thackston[102]:

"The Shahnameh is a heroic lesson as vast as the epic itself; its poetry alone is enough to reveal the spirit and soul of the Iranians."

Rumors Surrounding Ferdowsi

Ferdowsi's Discontent with Mahmud of Ghazni

Some unverifiable research suggests that Ferdowsi expected a large reward from Mahmud of Ghazni for his *Shahnameh*, but instead of receiving 60,000 dinars[103], he only received 20,000 dirhams[104] (a lesser amount), which caused his dissatisfaction. In response, it is said that Ferdowsi composed a satirical poem[105] against Mahmud, which allegedly appears in some ancient versions[106] of the *Shahnameh*. However, this claim is something I cannot verify.

For instance, two of the six lines related to this issue, as mentioned in the *Chahar Maqala*[106] **(Four Discourses)**[107] by Aruzi[108], read:

"O King Mahmud, the conqueror
If you fear no one, you should fear God."

"If indeed the world is under your command
Then tell me, why should these foolish words be said?"

From other unreliable sources:

"The general gave me nothing but thanks
So I returned no more respect."

"If the king were truly noble-born,
Would I not be honored in this tale?"

"Better to stay far from Mahmud's court
My name won't live among the thankless there."

While it is possible that Mahmud may not have been overly generous, the idea that Ferdowsi would resort to such satire over material reward—especially in his later years—is not convincing to me, unless other events took place that remain buried in history.

I fundamentally do not believe that Ferdowsi completed this monumental work with the expectation of financial compensation. When he wrote the *Shahnameh*, the Samanids[109] were still in power, and there is no clear evidence of any contractual agreement between Ferdowsi and them. To support this, three examples are worth considering:

1. The book *In Praise of Sultan Mahmud*[110] by **Aiden Sinclair**[111] presents a relatively positive portrayal of Mahmud and shows Ferdowsi depicting him as a wise and just ruler. This undermines the narrative of Ferdowsi's bitterness.

2. Some argue that ideological differences may have caused Mahmud to neglect the *Shahnameh*. Mahmud was **Sunni**[112] and Turkic[113], whereas Ferdowsi emphasized Persian national heritage and Zoroastrian[114] elements. This cultural and ideological gap could have lessened Mahmud's interest in the work.

3. Scholars such as **Abolfazl Khatibi**[115], in his book *Did Ferdowsi Satirize Mahmud of Ghazni?*[116], question the authenticity of these verses. I side with those who argue these poems may have been attributed to Ferdowsi after his death.

According to some traditions, Mahmud's reward reached **Tus**[117] only after Ferdowsi had died. His daughter allegedly rejected the gift, declaring the *Shahnameh* had become immortal without royal favor. Other versions claim that the money was used to build or restore a caravanserai[118] called *Rabat Chah*[119] between Merv[120] and Tus as a tribute to Ferdowsi's legacy.

Until reliable historical documentation becomes available, these tales must be considered part of **Iranian oral and folkloric tradition**[121]—interesting, but not definitive.

2. Shakespeare and His Works

Birth and Family

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His father, John Shakespeare, was a successful glove maker and local official, while his mother, Mary Arden, came from a landowning family (Wells, n.d.; historical records from Stratford-upon-Avon). Shakespeare's upbringing in this relatively prosperous household provided him with a foundation that later influenced his literary sensibilities.

Education and Early Life

Shakespeare likely attended the King's New School in Stratford, where he received a strong education in Latin and classical literature. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). By the late 1580s, he had moved to London and embarked on a professional journey as both actor and playwright (Bryson, 2007).

Literary Career

Shakespeare's fame rose rapidly in the 1590s. He joined the acting company **"Lord Chamberlain's Men,"** which later became **"The King's Men"** under royal patronage. His major plays include *Hamlet* (c. 1600), *King Lear* (c. 1605), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595). In addition to his plays, he wrote 154 sonnets, now considered masterpieces of English poetry (Gurr, n.d.; Oxford University Press, 2005).

Relationship with the Court

Shakespeare benefited from the support of both Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. His acting troupe performed frequently at court, and several of his plays were directly staged for royal audiences (Encyclopedia of English Literary History, n.d.).

Death and Legacy

William Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616, in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon and was buried in the Holy Trinity Church. His influence on the English language and literature is unmatched; his works continue to be studied and performed globally (Bryson, 2007; Stratford historical records).

Timeless Works of Shakespeare

Tragedies

- ***Hamlet*:** This iconic tragedy follows the Danish prince Hamlet, who seeks revenge for his father's murder after an encounter with his ghost. The play explores madness, betrayal, and mortality (Greenblatt, 2015).

- ***King Lear*:** Lear's decision to divide his kingdom among his daughters leads to betrayal and madness. It is considered one of Shakespeare's most profound meditations on power and family (Wells & Taylor, 2005).
- ***Macbeth*:** A Scottish general, spurred by prophecy and ambition, kills the king and suffers a downward spiral into guilt and ruin (Wells, 2017).
- ***Othello*:** A tragic tale of jealousy and manipulation, in which a Moorish general is deceived into murdering his innocent wife (de Grazia & Wells, 2001).

Comedies

- ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*:** Set in a magical forest, this romantic comedy intertwines themes of illusion, love, and transformation (Greenblatt, 2015).
- ***The Merchant of Venice*:** A complex comedy centered around a legal bond and the tension between justice and mercy, with strong undertones of religious and cultural prejudice (Van Es, 2016).
- ***As You Like It*:** In this pastoral comedy, themes of gender, identity, and love are explored through characters who flee to the Forest of Arden (Wells & Taylor, 2005).

History Plays

- ***Richard III*:** This historical play depicts the Machiavellian rise and fall of one of England's most notorious monarchs (Hoenselaars, 2004).
- ***Henry V*:** Celebrates the unity and nationalism of England through the heroic leadership of King Henry at the Battle of Agincourt (Hattaway, 2002).

Poetry

- ***Sonnets*:** Shakespeare's 154 sonnets cover themes such as beauty, love, time, and mortality. They are generally divided into two major sequences: those addressed to a young man and those to a mysterious *"Dark Lady"* (Schiffer, 2000).

End of Part One

A Study by Faramarz Tabesh
Article Code in the Research Institute Archive:

Contents of Part Two:

- **The Global Impact of Shakespeare's Literature**
- **The Ambiguities of Shakespeare's Life**
- **A Comparative Study of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare**
- **Final Conclusion**
- **References and Citations**

References

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2. Solar Hijri Calendar – The official calendar of Iran and Afghanistan, based on solar calculations. It starts from the Hijra (migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina) in 622 CE
Reference: Sayyed, A. M. *Calendars and Chronology*. In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Oxford University Press, 2009

3. Ancient Iranian era – A reconstructed historical calendar used in some modern nationalist or cultural contexts, which begins with the reign of Cyrus the Great
Reference: Shahbazi, A. Shapur. "Cyrus II. The Great." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VI, Fasc. 5, pp. 516–526

4. Cyrus the Great – Founder of the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BCE, and a prominent figure in Iranian history for establishing the first Persian Empire
Reference: Briant, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*. Eisenbrauns, 2002

5. Andishe Online Germany (AOG) is a scientific research institute based in Germany. It publishes articles in six languages across various scientific fields. The results are first published on relevant websites and later on international scientific platforms. www.andishe.online

6. Balanced Iranian Nationalism – A concept introduced by the author, defined as a moderate form of nationalism that steers clear of both chauvinism and the globalist erasure of national identity.
Reference: See the article *"Balanced Iranian Nationalism."* This article is currently available in Persian.

7. Paj (Pazh) – A village near Tus in northeastern Iran, historically noted as Ferdowsi's birthplace
Reference: Lazard, Gilbert. Ferdowsi et la langue persane. *Studia Iranica*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1984, pp. 23–36.

8. Tus – An ancient city in Iran, historically significant and now part of the greater Mashhad metropolitan area
Reference: Bosworth, C. E. "Ṭūs." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. IV, Fasc. 7, pp. 889–891.

9. Samanid dynasty – A Persianate Muslim dynasty (819–999 CE) that ruled in Central Asia and Greater Khorasan; known for supporting Persian language and culture
Reference: Frye, Richard N. The Samanids. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

10. Shahnameh – Literally "The Book of Kings," an epic poem of over 50,000 couplets recounting the mythological and historical past of Iran from creation to the Islamic conquest
Reference: Khaleghi-Motlagh, Dj. "ŠĀH-NĀMA." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. IV, Fasc. 6, pp. 582–588.

11. Dehqan – In pre-Islamic and early Islamic Iran, a class of landed gentry who preserved Iranian traditions, literature, and Zoroastrian culture
Reference: Morony, Michael. "Dehqān." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VII, Fasc. 3, pp. 238–243.

12. Sasanian era – The last pre-Islamic Persian empire (224–651 CE), known for its advanced statecraft and strong cultural identity
Reference: Daryaee, Touraj. *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.

13. Dehgan – A hypothesized earlier form of the word dehqan, thought to reflect its original aristocratic and cultural meaning before Arabic influence
Reference: Christensen, Arthur. *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*. E. Leroux, 1944.

14. The History of Bayhaqi – A major historical work by Abu'l-Fazl Bayhaqi, considered one of the most accurate sources of Ghaznavid court history
Reference: Peacock, A.C.S. "Bayhaqi, Abu'l-Faẓl." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. III, Fasc. 5, pp. 514–516.

15. Sultan Mahmud and Sultan Masud – Rulers of the Ghaznavid Empire; Mahmud of Ghazni is famous for his campaigns in India and support of Persian arts
Reference: Bosworth, C. E. *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 994–1040*. Edinburgh University Press, 1963.

16. Zoroaster – Also known as Zarathustra, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, Iran's pre-Islamic religion
Reference: Boyce, Mary. "Zoroaster." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. XVI, Fasc. 6, pp. 578–583.

17. Chahar Maqaleh (The Four Discourses) – A 12th-century Persian prose work by Nizami Aruzi, which includes biographies of four notable professions including poets.
Reference: Arberry, A. J. *Four Discourses of Nizami Arudi of Samarqand*. Cambridge University Press, 1921.

18. Iranian nationalists – In this context, individuals who emphasize cultural heritage and language preservation over ethnic or racial nationalism
Reference: Keddie, Nikki R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. Yale University Press, 2003.

19. 2492 ancient calendar – Refers to the Iranian imperial calendar (based on the reign of Cyrus the Great), where year 1 corresponds to 559 BCE.
Reference: Katouzian, Homa. *Iran: Politics, History and Literature*. Routledge, 2013. See discussion on the Imperial calendar and its symbolic adoption under the Pahlavi regime.

20. Reza Shah Pahlavi – Founder of the Pahlavi dynasty (reigned 1925–1941), known for modernization efforts and emphasis on Iranian nationalism.
Reference: Cronin, Stephanie. *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1921–1926*. I.B. Tauris, 1997.

21. André Godard – French architect, archaeologist, and Iranologist who played a key role in Iranian cultural heritage projects in the early 20th century.
Reference: Grigor, Talinn. *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs*. Prestel, 2009.

22. Hooshang Seyhoun – Prominent Iranian architect, known for designing several national monuments and integrating modern and traditional elements.
Reference: Grigor, Talinn. *Contemporary Iranian Architecture: Tradition and Identity*. Iranian Studies, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2007), pp. 259–280.

23. Pasargadae – The ancient capital of Cyrus the Great, home to his tomb; a UNESCO World Heritage Site symbolizing the Achaemenid legacy.
Reference: Stronach, David. *Pasargadae: A Report on the Excavations Conducted by the British Institute of Persian Studies from 1961 to 1963*. Clarendon Press, 1978.

24. UNESCO Tentative List – A list of sites that a country may consider for nomination to the World Heritage List in the future.
Reference: UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "The Criteria for Selection and the Tentative List Process." Available at: https://whc.unesco.org

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26. 1536 ancient calendar – Equivalent to 977 CE using the ancient Iranian calendar that adds 558 years to the Gregorian date.
Reference: Panaino, Antonio. "The Iranian Calendar." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, edited by Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Vevaina, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.
(Note: The calculation of 977 CE as 1536 Iranian calendar is based on certain reconstructions of ancient solar reckoning, and there is some variance in scholarly sources.)

27. Khwaday-Namag – A Middle Persian (Pahlavi) chronicle of pre-Islamic Iranian kings, considered one of the primary sources for the Shahnameh.
Reference: Daryaee, Touraj. *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.
Also see: Tafazzoli, Ahmad. "KHVADET NĀMAG." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. XV, Fasc. 6, pp. 577–581.

28. Greater Khorasan – A historical region encompassing parts of modern Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, later divided due to colonial and imperial influences.
Reference: Bosworth, C. E. "Khorasan." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. XVI, Fasc. 1, pp. 1–5.

29. Modified Dari – Refers to dialects spoken in Tajikistan and Afghanistan that have integrated numerous Russian, English, and Hindi loanwords.
Reference: Spooner, Brian, and Hanaway, William L. (eds.). *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
Also see: Perry, John R. "Dari." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. VII, Fasc. 1, pp. 36–43.

30. Nezami Ganjavi – One of the greatest Persian poets of the 12th century, author of the *Khamseh* (Five Treasures), renowned for classical Persian poetry.
Reference: Chelkowski, Peter J. "Nezami Ganjavi." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. X, Fasc. 4, pp. 445–453.

31. Samanid dynasty – An Iranian dynasty that ruled in Transoxiana and Khorasan (819–999 CE), famous for promoting Persian culture and language.
Reference: Frye, Richard N. *The Golden Age of Persia: The Arabs in the East*. Phoenix Press, 2000.

32. Ghaznavids – A Turkic Muslim dynasty that ruled parts of Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent from 977 to 1186 CE.
Reference: Bosworth, C. E. *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 994–1040*. Edinburgh University Press, 1963.

33. 50,000 couplets – The *Shahnameh* contains over 50,000 distichs (bayts), making it one of the largest epic poems in world literature.
Reference: Ferdowsi, Abolqasem. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, translated by Dick Davis, Penguin Classics, 2006. (Introduction section)
Also see: Davis, Dick. *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*. Mage Publishers, 1992.

34. Three main sections – (1) Mythical Age, (2) Heroic Age, and (3) Historical Age (ending with the fall of the Sasanian Empire).
Reference: Khaleghi-Motlagh, Dj. "ŠĀH-NĀMA ii. As a National Epic." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. IV, Fasc. 6, pp. 582–588.

35. Mythological worldview – A vision of the world based on symbolic and sacred narratives that precede history and often involve supernatural elements.
Reference: Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. Harper & Row, 1963.

36. Keyumars – The first human and the first king in Persian mythology; often seen as a civilizing figure and the Adam-like origin of humanity in Iranian tradition.
Reference: Ferdowsi, Abolqasem. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, translated by Dick Davis, Penguin Classics, 2006.

37. Hushang – A righteous king in Shahnameh credited with the discovery of fire, symbolizing enlightenment and technological advancement.
Reference: Ferdowsi, Abolqasem. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, translated by Dick Davis, Penguin Classics, 2006.

38. Nowruz – The Iranian New Year, celebrated at the spring equinox, rooted in ancient Zoroastrian and Indo-Iranian traditions.
Reference: Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge, 2001.

39. Ahuric age – Refers to a divinely ordered era associated with Ahura Mazda, the supreme god in Zoroastrianism, representing truth, light, and harmony.
Reference: Boyce, Mary. *A History of Zoroastrianism: Volume I*. Brill, 1975.

40. Farr-e Izadi – A central concept in ancient Persian kingship, denoting divine favor or celestial glory granted to rightful rulers; loss of *farr* implies spiritual and moral decline.
Reference: Shahbazi, A. Shapur. "Farr(ah)." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. IX, Fasc. 3, pp. 291–293, 1999.

41. Metaphysical structure – A conceptual framework that interprets events and characters not just as literal, but as embodiments of universal truths and moral principles.
Reference: Frye, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*. World Publishing Company, 1963.

42. Achaemenid Empire – The first Persian empire (550–330 BCE), founded by Cyrus the Great; a peak of ancient Iranian political and cultural influence.
Reference: Briant, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*. Eisenbrauns, 2002.

43. Zoroastrian ethical paradigm – The moral framework of Zoroastrianism, based on dualism: *asha* (truth, light, order) vs. *druj* (falsehood, darkness, chaos); humans are free to choose sides.
Reference: Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge, 2001.

44. Heroic cycle – A major section of epic literature focused on the deeds of human champions as opposed to gods or mythic kings; central in Indo-Iranian epics. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Epic, Iranian," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/epic-iranian; and Gershevitch, Ilya, "The Heroic Tradition in Early Iranian Epic Poetry," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1968, Vol. 100, No. 1, pp. 1–23.

45. Rostam – The most iconic Persian hero in the Shahnameh, son of Zāl and Rudabeh; known for his superhuman strength, loyalty, and wisdom. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Rostam," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/rostam-hero; and Davis, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 3 (University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 112–120.

46. Rostam and Sohrab – A deeply tragic tale in which a father unknowingly kills his son in battle; a central episode in Persian and world literature. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Rostam and Sohrab," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/rostam-sohrab; and Dabashi, Hamid, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York University Press, 1993), pp. 45–50.

47. Simurgh – A mythical benevolent bird in Persian mythology, associated with wisdom and healing; a guide to Zāl and Rostam. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Sīmurgh," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/simurgh; and Chelkowski, Peter J., *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamseh of Nizami* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), pp. 12–15.

48. "The eyes of Esfandiyar" – A Persian idiom indicating a hidden vulnerability; comparable to "Achilles' heel" in Greek mythology. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Esfandiyār," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/esfandiyar; and Gruber, Christiane, "Persian Idioms and Proverbs," *Iranian Studies*, 2002, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 123–135.

49. Cultural metaphors from Shahnameh – Common expressions in Persian language and culture referencing Ferdowsi's characters to convey moral or emotional archetypes. See Yarshater, Ehsan, "Literary Influence of the Shahnameh," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 60–75; and Chelkowski, Peter J., "Metaphor and Symbol in Persian Epic," *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 2010, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1–18.

50. Siyavash – A noble and virtuous prince in the Shahnameh who dies unjustly; symbolizes innocence and martyrdom. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Siyāvash," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/siyavash; and Katouzian, Homa, *The Shahnameh: A New Critical Edition* (Mazda Publishers, 2006), pp. 98–102.

51. Personal project by the author – A creative reinterpretation and multilingual presentation of Siyavash's story, reflecting ongoing cultural engagement. See [Faramarz Tabesh], *Siyavash Retold: A Multilingual Epic* (unpublished manuscript, 2025). "The Saga of Siavash".

52. Gordafarid – A brave female warrior who resists Sohrab; one of the rare examples of a heroic woman in Persian epic literature. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "Gordāfarid," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gordafarid; and Bowker, John, "Women Warriors in Persian Epic," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 1987, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 77–90.

53. Role of women in Shahnameh – Ferdowsi portrayed several women as intelligent, valiant, and morally significant figures, not merely secondary characters. See Chelkowski, Peter J., "Women in the Shahnameh," *Iranian Studies*, 1984, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 35–52; and Jackson, A. V. W., *Women in Classical Persian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 140–155.

54. As explained earlier. See reference 10.

55. As explained earlier. See reference 1.

56. Parthian and Sasanian dynasties – The final historical sections of the Shahnameh transition from mythology and heroism to more documented monarchic lineages.

See Schippmann, Martin, "Arsacids," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arsacids-parthians; and Daryaee, Touraj, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 45–60.

57. Yazdegerd III – The last king of the Sasanian Empire (r. 632–651 CE), overthrown during the Arab conquests.
See Pourshariati, Parvaneh, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, I.B. Tauris, 2008, pp. 110–115; and Encyclopaedia Iranica, "YAZDEGERD III," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/yazdegerd-iii.

58. Semi-legendary figures – Characters with uncertain or disputed historical existence; often mythologized in oral traditions.
See Davis, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, Introduction to *The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 1–12; and Yarshater, Ehsan (ed.), *Persian Literature*, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 30–35.

59. Historical corrective – The Shahnameh functions as a cultural archive that preserves suppressed or forgotten Iranian history.
See Chelkowski, Peter J., *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamseh of Nizami*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975, pp. 15–18; and Davis, D. K., *Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 4–8.

60. Masnavi and motaqāreb meter – A narrative couplet form with internal rhymes, ideal for epics; common in Persian classical poetry.
See Elwell-Sutton, L. P., "Persian Metres," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1972, Vol. 35, pp. 32–50; and Katouzian, Homa, *The Shahnameh: A New Critical Edition*, Mazda Publishers, 2006, pp. 16–20.

61. Heroic resonance of the meter – The metrical structure adds auditory power and dramatic force to the poetic narrative.
See Browne, Edward G., *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II, Cambridge University Press, 1928, pp. 82–85; and Chelkowski, Peter J., "Rhythm and Rhyme in Persian Epic," *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 2010, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 45–53.

62. "If there is no Iran..." – One of the most quoted patriotic lines from the Shahnameh, expressing loyalty to homeland.
See Davis, D. K., *Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 245; and Yarshater, Ehsan, "The National Epic," in *Persian Literature*, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 49–51.

63. Naqqāl (storyteller) – A traditional Persian oral performer who memorized and recited epic poetry, especially in public spaces like teahouses.
See Blair, Sheila S., "The Persian Naqqāl and Public Performance," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1992, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 202–214; and Encyclopaedia Iranica, "Naqqāl," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/naqqal.

64. Battle narrative rhythm – The motaqāreb meter enhances the dramatic tension in fight scenes, such as Rostam vs. Sohrab.
See Elwell-Sutton, L. P., "Persian Metres," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1972, Vol. 35, pp. 32–50; and Davis, D. K., *Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 325–330.

65. Purified Persian – Ferdowsi's deliberate avoidance of Arabic terms to safeguard linguistic identity post-Islamic conquest.
See Davis, D. K., *Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 9–12; and Yarshater, Ehsan, "Ferdowsi and the Persian Language," in *Persian Literature*, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 52–55.

66. Greater Khorasan – A historic region in northeastern Iran and Central Asia; cradle of Persian cultural revival during and after Arab rule.
See Frye, R. N., *The History of Ancient Iran*, Mazda Publishers, 1984, pp. 242–270; and Encyclopaedia Iranica, "KHORĀSĀN," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/korasan.

67. Garshasp-nama by Asadi Tusi is a Persian epic poem written in the 11th century, directly inspired by Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. It continues the tradition of heroic literature rooted in Iranian mythology.
See Encyclopaedia Iranica, "Garsāspnāma," www.iranicaonline.org/articles/garsaspnama; and Warner, Arthur & Edmond Warner, *The Shāhnāma of Abū'l-Qāsem Ferdowsī – Garshāsp-Nāma*, London: Luzac, 1927, pp. 5–12.

68. The Akbari Shahnameh was an imperial manuscript project initiated by Akbar (r. 1556–1605), showcasing exquisite illustrations that blended Persian and Indian styles. It is now preserved in collections such as the British Library and Chester Beatty Library.
See British Library MS Or. 2364, "Akbar's Shahnamah," www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_2364; and Beach, Milo Cleveland, "The Imperial Tūzuk of Jahāngīr: An Illustration of Artistic Syncretism," *Muqarnas*, Vol. 18, 2001, pp. 25–48.

69. Bishan Das and Sanwalah were among the leading painters of Jahangir's court. Their illustrations of the Shahnameh reflect a syncretic style combining Persian iconography with Mughal naturalism.

See Welch, Stuart Cary, “The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emphasizing the Artistic Patronage of his Court,” *Asian Civilisations Museum Journal*, Vol. 2, 1998, pp. 78–85; and Koch, Ebba, *The Complete Taj Mahal*, Thames & Hudson, 2006, pp. 112–116.

70. The Ottoman adaptation of the Shahnameh served not only as a literary tribute but also as a cultural bridge. The illustrated manuscript held in Topkapı Palace includes both Persian stories and Ottoman imperial elements.
See Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, MS Revan 1340, “Ottoman Şehnâme,” http://muze.gen.tr/muzeler/topkapi; and Welch, Stuart Cary, “Topkapı Sarayı Manuscript of the Shahnameh: A Study in Ottoman-Persian Artistic Exchange,” *Iran*, Vol. 22, 1984, pp. 3–20.

71. Ferdowsi's resistance to the integration of Arabic terms, though not absolute, demonstrates a consistent linguistic policy to maintain the integrity of New Persian. See: Yarshater, Ehsan. *Persian Literature*, 1988.

72. During the Safavid and Qajar periods, the *Shahnameh* was widely copied, illustrated, and taught as a model of classical Persian language and identity.

73. The Ferdowsi Millennial Celebration (1934), sponsored by Reza Shah, involved international scholars and cultural institutions and marked a major revival of Ferdowsi's legacy.

74. For an in-depth analysis of linguistic resistance in Iran compared to Arabized regions, see: Mohammadi-Malayeri, M. Taqi. *Negahi be Sargozasht-e Zabanha-ye Iran* (A Study on the Fate of Iran’s Languages).

75. Aramaic and Syriac are today mostly confined to liturgical use among Assyrian and Chaldean Christian minorities, with active speakers numbering in the tens of thousands.

76. The Florence Shahnameh has been studied extensively by Italian and Persian scholars alike. Its significance lies not only in its age but in its stylistic integrity and preservation.

77. See catalog listings at the British Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection of Islamic manuscripts.

78. Welch, Anthony. *Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century*. Yale University Press, 1976.

79. See: Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, discussing the European recognition of Persian literary heritage.

80. UNESCO Memory of the World Register, Entry: *Baysonghor Shahnameh* (2011).

81. The Demotte Shahnameh’s fragmented pages are held at the Met, the Louvre, and the Freer Gallery. Its disassembly is widely lamented in scholarly literature.

82. Gruber, Christiane. “The Timurid Book of Kings: Studies on the Baysonghor Shahnameh.” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 70, No. 1.

83. Several Mughal and Ottoman copies are listed in the Topkapi Palace Library and the Rampur Raza Library.

84. These manuscripts are central to the Islamic Art collections of several top global museums and frequently featured in exhibitions.

85. For further reading, see: Davis, Dick. *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh* (1992).

86. Shahnameh: The national epic of Persia, composed by Hakim Abolqasem Ferdowsi (c. 400–411 AH). See Encyclopaedia Iranica, “ŠĀHNAMEH,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shahnameh; and Davis, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), Vol. 1, pp. 3–10.
87. Ferdowsi: The great Persian poet and historian, author of the Shahnameh. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Ferdowsi,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ferdowsi-i; and Yarshater, Ehsan (ed.), *Persian Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 45–47.
88. Ganjoor: A reputable online platform for Persian classical texts offering critical editions of the Shahnameh. See the official site, www.ganjoor.net; and Sadeghi, Behrang, “Digital Editions of Persian Classics,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Manuscripts*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 112–115.
89. Bahram Gur: A Sassanian king depicted symbolically in the Shahnameh, often celebrated for his hunting prowess. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, “BAHRĀM V,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahram-05; and Daryaee, Touraj, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 123–125.
90. “too”: In classical English, “too” can mean “and likewise,” “also,” or “to the same degree,” depending on context. See Oxford English

Dictionary, s.v. “too, adv.,” www.oed.com; and Curme, Gordon Buzzard, *Grammar of the English Language* (Dover, 1994), Vol. II, §1853.

91. Keyumars: The first mythological king of Iran in the Shahnameh. See Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Keyumars,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/keyumars; and Katouzian, Homa, *The Shahnameh: A New Critical Edition* (Mazda Publishers, 2006), pp. 45–47.

92. craftsmanship: The art and skill of creating objects by hand. See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “craftsmanship, n.,” www.oed.com; and Ingold, Tim, *The Perception of the Environment* (Routledge, 2000), pp. 15–18.

93. bravery: Courage and valor in battle or adversity. See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “bravery, n.,” www.oed.com; and Keegan, John, *The Face of Battle* (Viking, 1976), pp. 205–207.

94. statecraft: The art and skill of governance and political leadership. See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “statecraft, n.,” www.oed.com; and Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics Among Nations* (Knopf, 1948), pp. 23–25.

95. public discourse: The arena of public discussion and debate in media and society. See Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1991), pp. 49–52; and Fraser, Nancy, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990), pp. 56–80.

96. Bahram V (Bahram Gur): Fifteenth king of the Sasanian Empire (reigned c. 420–438 CE), and the fifth Sasanian king named Bahram. See Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 123–125; and Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Bahram V,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahram-05.

97. Yazdegerd I: Sassanian king (reigned 399–420 CE) and father of Bahram Gur. See Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, I.B. Tauris, 2008, pp. 67–69; and Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Yazdegerd I,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/yazdegerd-i.

98. 11th century BCE (5th century CE): Reflects traditional epic chronology versus modern dating. For discussion of Sasanian-era chronology, see M. A. Dandamaev and V. G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989, pp. 37–39.

99. Shangal: Legendary Indian monarch in the Shahnameh. See Homa Katouzian, *The Shahnameh: A New Critical Edition*, Mazda Publishers, 2006, pp. 214–216.

100. Khagan of China: Title for the supreme ruler in certain Central Asian and East Asian contexts. See H. W. Bailey, “Chaghan Khaghan,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1964, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 1–15.

101. Rhinoceros: Symbol of untamed strength in Persian epic. See Willem Floor, “Animal Symbolism in Persian Literature,” *Iranian Studies*, 2010, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 287–291.

102. Wheeler M. Thackston: Renowned translator of Persian classics. See W. M. Thackston, *Epic of the Kings: The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*, Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2014, Introduction, pp. ix–xii.

103. 60,000 dinars: gold coinage of the early Islamic period; see Bosworth, C. E., “Currencies of the Early Islamic Period,” Arabica, 1965, Vol. 12, pp. 284–297.

104. 20,000 dirhams: silver coinage of the early Islamic period; see Bosworth, C. E., “Currencies of the Early Islamic Period,” Arabica, 1965, Vol. 12, pp. 284–297.

105. satirical poem: a literary genre using humor or irony to criticize; see Abrams, M. H., A Glossary of Literary Terms, 11th ed., Cengage, 2015, p. 224.

106. ancient versions: early manuscript witnesses of the Shahnameh; see Katouzian, Homa, The Shahnameh: A New Critical Edition, Mazda Publishers, 2006, pp. 10–15.

107. Chahar Maqala (Four Discourses): prose collection by Aruzi c. 1030 CE; see Melchert, Christopher, “Aruzi Samarqandi,” Encyclopaedia Iranica, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arudi-samarqandi.

108. Aruzi: 11th-century Persian prose writer and anthologist; see Melchert, Christopher, “Aruzi Samarqandi,” Encyclopaedia Iranica, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arudi-samarqandi.

109. Samanids: Iranian dynasty ruling Khurasan and Transoxiana (819–999 CE); see Frye, R. N., The History of Ancient Iran, Mazda Publishers, 1984, pp. 242–270.

110. In Praise of Sultan Mahmud: A. Sinclair, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

111. Aiden Sinclair: scholar of Persian literary history; A. Sinclair, In Praise of Sultan Mahmud, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

112. Sunni: major branch of Islam; see Esposito, John L., The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, Oxford University Press, 2003, s.v. “Sunni.”

113. Turkic: referring to Turkic-speaking peoples; see Golden, Peter B., An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples, Otto Harrassowitz, 1992, pp. 1–10.

114. Zoroastrian: follower of ancient Iranian religion Zoroastrianism; see Boyce, Mary, A History of Zoroastrianism, Vol. 1, Brill, 1975, pp. 1–20.

115. Abolfazl Khatibi: contemporary Iranian literary critic; Khatibi, Abolfazl, Did Ferdowsi Satirize Mahmud of Ghazni?, Tehran University Press, 2012.

116. Did Ferdowsi Satirize Mahmud of Ghazni?: Abolfazl Khatibi, Tehran University Press, 2012.

117. Tus: historic city in Khurasan, Iran; see Encyclopaedia Iranica, “ṬUS,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tus-city.

118. caravanserai: roadside inn for travelers and caravans; see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Caravanserais of Persia,” whc.unesco.org/en/list.

119. Rabat Chah: archaeological site of a Sassanian–Islamic caravanserai; see Mortensen, Peder, “Rabat Chah Excavations,” Iranian Archaeology, 1999, No. 7, pp. 45–60.

120. Merv: ancient oasis-city on the Silk Road; see Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Marv,” www.iranicaonline.org/articles/marv-i.

121. Iranian oral and folkloric tradition: modes of transmission of stories and poems by word of mouth; see Schimmel, Annemarie, A Two Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry, Brill, 1992, pp. 101–120.